

**Minutes**  
**Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission**  
**September 22, 2015 at 7:00 pm**

**Members present:**

Ermete J. Raffaelli, Chairman  
Wayne Jonas Bealer, Vice Chairman  
Michael E. Lauter, Secretary  
William F. Cinfici, Assistant Secretary

**Staff present:**

Andrew W. Miller, Planning Office  
Deborah A.S. Hoag, Department of Public Works

**Others present:**

Bruce T. Rader, Berks Surveying & Engineering Inc.  
Rajeshkumar Patel, Laxmi Donuts Inc.  
Marvin Unger, Laxmi Donuts Inc.  
Donald A. Haas, Bogia Engineering Inc.  
Thomas B. Ludgate, Ludgate Engineering Corporation  
Gabriel A. Hutchinson, Hutchinson Realty Development LLC  
Dee Anderson, Hutchinson Realty Development LLC  
Stephen F. DeLucas, Reading Eagle Company

Chairman Raffaelli called the September meeting to order, reminded presenters to sign the attendance sheet, and asked for acceptance of the agenda. Mr. Miller noted a request to add 'other business' regarding transportation improvements proposed on North 2nd Street, on behalf of the Wyomissing Foundation. Mr. Lauter moved to accept the September 22nd agenda, with the addition. Mr. Cinfici seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the expanded September agenda.

**Subdivision and Land Development:**

Warren Street Dunkin Donuts – final land development plan [0:01.54]

Mr. Rader introduced his client as the equitable owner of the property currently owned by Stoudt Auto Sales, and situate at the intersection of the Warren Street Bypass (PA Route 12) and Allegheny Avenue. He reported that they'd already been permitted by the Zoning Administrator and have recently included additional curbing in response to some early feedback from the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), who'd recommended some kind of buffer from the Bypass. He asked if the Commission had any questions. Mr. Lauter suggested they further explain the project, as it was a first presentation to the Commission. Mr. Rader described a 'mostly vacant' site that includes an existing billboard, to remain, and a shed, to be removed. He indicated two driveway lanes, one a drive-through service window, and ten off-street parking spaces. He referred to review letters received from both the Planning Office and Public Works Department. Asked to explain the PennDOT review, he clarified that they'd seen an earlier version of the plan, before the curbing was added to what currently exists as an unrestricted, full-width driveway at its boundary with the Bypass. Having confirmed that the building would 'front' Allegheny Avenue, Mr. Lauter sought a representation of the building's appearance. Mr. Rader described a one-story building, about 18 feet in height, and similar in architectural style to the other franchise locations in the area. Mr. Lauter suggested something more definitive, like elevation renderings.

Asked about a traffic study, Mr. Rader said they hadn't prepared one. Ms. Hoag characterized the traffic circulation as the biggest engineering concern, notably its interface with the Bypass, the use of the alley (between and parallel to Allegheny Avenue and Carbon Street), the parking arrangements vis-à-vis the drive-through lane, a pedestrian route to the building, and the vehicular 'stacking' associated with the drive-through lane. Mr. Bealer observed that, on the opposite side of the Bypass, all the intersecting streets had been closed. Mr. Raffaelli added that it was trending toward a limited-access highway design, while leaving exceptions to accommodate some of the existing businesses. He recognized some recent development of the corridor, including a Sunoco gas station at 200 Warren Street not reviewed by the Commission. He considered it another dangerous situation, though with more circulation and staging area. Mr. Bealer described a changing alignment in the curbing pattern that provides for a deceleration/turning area at the shoulder. He thought the popularity observed at other Dunkin Donuts locations called for special consideration of its traffic impacts. Mr. Rader said they were willing to conduct a traffic study. Mr. Raffaelli thought PennDOT might already have all the necessary background data, and expressed a concern for potential liability on the City. He speculated that a plan for access from the secondary streets may be more

workable, and questioned the competence of any traffic engineer approving of the proposed arrangement. Mr. Rader agreed to perform a study and referred to the preliminary comments from PennDOT, which did not openly oppose the concept shown. Ms. Hoag questioned the distance between the proposed driveway and the intersection of Allegheny Avenue with the Bypass, thinking it appeared to be a minimum required of driveway designs on lower-speed roads. Mr. Rader suggested the highway's shoulder could provide a deceleration opportunity. Ms. Hoag expressed a greater concern for the potential queue formations and for the traffic reentering the Bypass, anticipating high volumes. Mr. Rader felt that drivers should be more courteous. Mr. Bealer reiterated that the PennDOT standards would apply, whatever the behavior of local drivers. Mr. Raffaelli said the criticism wasn't meant as a resistance to the business, but a concern for safety and potential liability for the City. Mr. Rader again intended a traffic study, and compliance with all PennDOT and City regulations. He turned to the Public Works Department's review, specifically its comments regarding maneuverability and use of the parking spaces. Asked how many vehicles could queue between the driveway and the 'order board', Mr. Patel estimated five. Ms. Hoag said that at three, the queue would begin to block the adjacent parking spaces. Mr. Rader conceded that leaving those spaces would require those vehicles to get in the queue and wait. Mr. Bealer thought that would hurt a business built on an average of 60- to 90-second service turnarounds. He predicted queues extending into Allegheny Avenue and rear-end accidents from cars coming off the Bypass. Mr. Raffaelli suggested they consider the redesigned McDonalds, at 400 Lancaster Avenue, and the backups formed even with two drive-through lanes. Mr. Bealer thought it seemed easier for through-traffic to change lanes in that corridor, in addition to the lower posted speeds. Mr. Lauter noted the traffic entering from the West Shore Bypass (US Route 422), just a couple blocks to the west, as contributing to that challenge. Asked about the anticipated traffic at 'peak hours' and the turn-around times, Mr. Patel estimated 80 to 100 cars per hour and 60- to 80-second visits.

Mr. Miller asked about their intention for the alley bordering the parcel's northeast boundary. Mr. Rader said they could block it off, if required. Asked why the proposed fencing only appeared to partially separate it, he said it was meant to protect a parking space. Ms. Hoag recognized the potential short-cutting of the queue. Mr. Miller asked about their designs on 1340 Carbon Street, on the other side of that alley. Mr. Rader mentioned a plan, presented to the Zoning Office, to tear down an existing house for a new parking lot. He said it would serve a three-space retail and apartment project planned for 1350 Carbon Street. He said it didn't have anything to do with the Dunkin Donuts project, and there wasn't any intent to have their patrons crossing the alley between the two.

Mr. Raffaelli asked about the ownership of the existing billboard and the terms of its lease. Mr. Patel answered that it was Lamar Advertising's installation, who had paid Stoudt Auto Sales \$25 thousand, in 1983, for an indefinite easement. Ms. Hoag considered the structural integrity of the billboard and the potential hazard to a building beneath it. Asked if there were any further questions on the staff reviews, Mr. Rader summarized many of those comments as concerning drafting changes and corrections, recognizing a traffic study as the priority. He referred to a comment concerning pedestrian access, and indicated the lack of existing sidewalk on that side of Allegheny Avenue. A waiver was requested. Mr. Lauter called attention to a lack of a curb 'return' into the driveways and, in the case of the area between the exit driveway and the Avenue-Bypass intersection shown to remain as paving, a potential for drivers to turn into that area rather than the street. Ms. Hoag noted that the 'cooler' annex didn't seem to be included in the building area calculated. Mr. Raffaelli said there seemed to be several issues to address, in addition to the traffic concerns, and asked the staff's recommendation. Mr. Miller agreed, and thought the PennDOT input necessary to move the conversation forward.

Mr. Bealer moved to table the 'Warren Street Dunkin Donuts' plan. Mr. Cinfici seconded. And, following some clarification, the Commission voted unanimously to table the final plan.

#### Hydrojet, Inc. – revision-to-record land development plan [1:01.45]

Mr. Haas believed they'd addressed the remaining issues, including the Zoning Office and Berks County Conservation District approvals, leaving only a few notes yet to be added.

Mr. Bealer moved to approve the 'Hydrojet, Inc.' revision plan, on the basis of the last Planning Office and Public Works Department reviews. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve Hydrojet's revision-to-record plan.

**Resolution #47-2015**

#### S. 6th Street Family Dollar – preliminary land development plan [1:04.49]

Mr. Ludgate described the site at 400 South 6th Street, and the former market house lost in a May 14, 2005 fire. He said it'd been left as a vacant lot since, and is now proposed for a new Family Dollar store with off-street parking in front. He showed a loading area on its side (the South 6th Street frontage) and an additional parking lot across the street (at 401 South 6th Street). He said the plan required extensive zoning relief, including the regulations on use, setbacks and loading areas. He said that was appealed and granted earlier that month. He acknowledged the Planning Office and Public Works Department review letters, and consented to the changes

advised. Mr. Miller noted that his review was only issued earlier that day, figuring they'd need some time to fully consider it. Mr. Ludgate recognized the historic district covering the site. He said the store would be typical of the franchise, but with a brick façade, and still required a Historical Architectural Review Board (HARB) review. Asked the identity of the architect, he referred to an 'in-house' company designer in North Carolina. Mr. Miller asked about architectural elevations. Mr. Ludgate suggested faux windows to treat the South 6th Street face. At a preference expressed for real windows, he doubted the developer would agree, as display space could be limited. He predicted once-a-week tractor-trailer deliveries. Mr. Raffaelli thought South 6th Street the building's dominant elevation, and suggested improvements to the façade design. Mr. Lauter preferred to have the HARB's input before influencing the design in any particular direction. He questioned the 'front' facing Bingaman Street, given the longer and closer façade adjacent to South 6th Street. Mr. Ludgate thought they might be able to soften that presentation with some form of a buffer strip. Asked if that meant landscaping, Ms. Anderson said yes. Mr. Miller asked about the differences between it and the smaller 'prototype' design for a Lancaster Avenue proposal, subject of the next presentation. Mr. Hutchinson said he offered the brick façade as a gesture to the community. He said he'd continue to own the store, following construction, and was sensitive to its appearance. Asked about the operational differences between the two designs, he referred to market studies indicating the differences in demand and the merchandise to serve it. Mr. Miller noted that the latter example showed a natural gas service. Mr. Ludgate expected the South 6th Street store likely would as well, explaining that the plan didn't yet have that level of detail. Regarding the designed 'front', Mr. Hutchinson felt it to be the layout best serving the community, and a preference of the brand. Mr. Ludgate indicated the access to the parking lot and said the size and shape of the site influenced the layout. Mr. Cinfici assumed there to be more traffic on Bingaman Street than on South 6th Street. Mr. Ludgate said that was possible, but didn't recognize much on either. Mr. Cinfici called the former market house an 'architectural gem', recalling its iron columns. He said he didn't expect a reproduction, but encouraged further customization of the store's architecture. Mr. Hutchinson promised it'd be a unique design, and complimented the assistance of the City staff and review boards. He intended to satisfy everyone's concerns and hoped they'd feel good about the project. Mr. Cinfici suggested some further study, but appreciated the effort. He regretted the long vacancy of the site, recalling a grandparent's stand in the former market and the plans to revitalize it just before the fire. He thought the store would serve a need, and mentioned façade treatment alternatives to fenestration, like decorative brickwork and artworks. Mr. Raffaelli suggested reflecting the portico 'theme' that sheltered the sidewalks of the market house. Mr. Ludgate thought there might be room enough to do something in that direction. Ms. Anderson noted that they'd be improving the brick alley and surrounding sidewalks, at least, and were considering a buffer space. Mr. Ludgate added that the proposed monument sign is a departure from the standard, and higher pylon signage. Mr. Raffaelli asked about the recent acquisition by Dollar Tree Inc. Mr. Hutchinson understood that they'd be keeping the separate brand identities. Mr. Miller agreed that they should seek the HARB's input before preempting it by suggesting specific design changes. He said he wanted that guidance before forming his own opinion. Mr. Lauter said it wasn't simply a matter of façade materials or mimicking the previous style, but a need to reflect and compliment the character of the surrounding neighborhood. Ms. Anderson mentioned working with the Historic Preservation Office, and being provided photographs of the former building. Asked about a zoning permit to follow the successful appeal, Mr. Ludgate expected it would be issued once they showed some required changes. He intended some other specific changes to the plan based on the staff reviews.

When questioned on the traffic and circulation issues, Ms. Anderson said a study revealed most of their customers would be pedestrians. She said they counted 2900 vehicles on Bingaman Street and between 250 and 300 on South 6th Street. Mr. Hutchinson said other stores indicate between 50 and 60 percent of the visits to be foot traffic. Mr. Bealer observed that the parking lot is never filled at the 323 North 4th Street store. Mr. Hutchinson noted the same at the 840 Penn Street location. Asked about the satellite parking at 401 South 6th Street, Mr. Ludgate counted eight spaces and some landscaping, figuring it to be available as 'community parking'. Mr. Miller asked about the grading plan. Mr. Ludgate intended to clarify the apparent lack of detail, and said the changes would be minimal given the relatively flat existing condition of the site. Mr. Hutchinson referred to a possible 'basement' space requiring fill. Mr. Miller wondered about geotechnical and environmental concerns. Mr. Ludgate wasn't aware of a basement, nor of any subsurface investigation or assessment. Mr. Bealer asked about a designated pedestrian crossing between the parcels. Mr. Ludgate said the 401 South 6th Street parking spaces weren't being counted toward the zoning requirement. Mr. Miller suggested they establish some definitive policy for that parking, considering the assumed use observed in recent years. He asked for an explanation of the loading area. Mr. Ludgate described the design along the South 6th Street side, and the possibility of preserving some on-street parking between the pull-in and pull-out points, which will be lined with standard curbing. Ms. Hoag encouraged they do, given the once-a-week schedule for deliveries and for the benefit of stormwater control. Discussing the route of those delivery trucks, Mr. Ludgate described an approach from the Bingaman Street Bridge to Laurel Street to South 6th Street, then likely continuing northward toward Penn Street and the other stores in the area. Ms. Anderson counted three other stores on its route. Asked if there'd be a driveway from Bingaman Street, Mr. Ludgate said

there wasn't, though vehicles could access the parking lot from the alley bordering the west side of the parcel. Ms. Anderson committed to the necessary maintenance of the auxiliary parking. Mr. Hutchinson said a number of 'housekeeping' policy changes were being implemented by Family Dollar's corporate management. Mr. Ludgate requested a preliminary approval, since there was no Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) involvement or sewage planning issues. Mr. Miller advised the Commission to table the plan, pending a zoning permit, a County Planning review and a HARB presentation expected in October.

Mr. Lauter moved to table the 'S. 6th Street Family Dollar' plan. Mr. Cinfici seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the Family Dollar preliminary plan.

**LGN: Lancaster Ave. Family Dollar – preliminary land development plan [1:51.15]**

Mr. Ludgate continued with a similar proposal for 229 and 231 Lancaster Avenue and 238 Brookline Street; three parcels to be consolidated. He said the existing buildings would be demolished. He explained that this project also required zoning relief, but less than that of the South 6th Street site. He thought the plan a lot less complicated, except for the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) jurisdiction over the driveway access. He already consulted PennDOT, through its 'scoping application', taking from it the options of either a 'right in-right out' restriction on a new access or a shared access with the laundromat next door at 209 Lancaster Avenue. He said the laundromat owner wasn't amenable to the latter option. He expected this building to be more 'corporate looking' than the South 6th Street project. Mr. Hutchinson proposed a combination of split-faced block, HardiePanel® siding and some steel siding, noting that Family Dollar is continually changing their design standards. Mr. Bealer noted the landscaping proposed for the corner, and asked about the intent for the Lancaster Avenue frontage. Mr. Ludgate recalled the Zoning Hearing Board directing street-tree planting, and intended to consult the City Arborist. He felt he could satisfy all of the issues raised in the staff reviews, and confirmed the store would front architecturally to Lancaster Avenue. Asked about the appearance of the Carroll Street elevation, he explained the screening effect of the proposed landscaping. Mr. Miller noted that the building would be *elevated*, from that perspective, while recognizing the depth of the green space between it and the street. Mr. Raffaelli recommended increasing the share of the masonry and extending the units to that side. Mr. Hutchinson expressed his anxiety at design changes, which have to be approved by the corporate structure and risks 'killing the deal'. Mr. Raffaelli said franchises often have cost-sensitive alternate designs, citing the McDonalds at the catty-cornered 400 Lancaster Avenue. Mr. Hutchinson agreed to pursue it. Mr. Raffaelli added that Lancaster Avenue has enjoyed a kind of 'renaissance' in its appearance, following the redevelopment of several properties in recent years. Asked about the change in impervious coverage, Mr. Ludgate calculated an eight-percent reduction. Mr. Miller asked about a representation in the application materials suggesting the Veterans Car Sales business (at 231 Lancaster Avenue and 238 Brookline Street) was abandoned. Ms. Anderson clarified that they no longer use the building at 231 Lancaster Avenue, and would be relocating. Mr. Miller said again that his review letter was issued at the 'last minute', and advised the Commission to table the plan for most of the same reasons as the last. Mr. Ludgate said he'd soon be applying formally for the highway-occupancy permit. At the assumption that this location would experience more automobile traffic, Ms. Anderson said their study again suggests a share of pedestrian business.

Mr. Bealer moved to table the 'LGN: Lancaster Ave. Family Dollar' plan. Mr. Cinfici seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table another Family Dollar preliminary plan.

**Other business:**

**§303.a.1 review-transportation improvements, 100 block of North 2nd Street (Wyomissing Foundation) [2:09.01]**

Mr. Haas said the Wyomissing Foundation is proposing to fund improvements, aimed at pedestrian convenience and safety, at the crosswalks on North 2nd Street between Penn Street and Washington Street. He described 'bulb outs' at the corners, meant to shorten the pedestrian crossing and provide on-street parking spaces between them. Mr. Raffaelli wondered why the Wyomissing Foundation had to address traffic concerns that would otherwise be the City's responsibility. Mr. Lauter thought the presenter was the wrong person to ask, and assumed it had something to do with cost. Mr. Haas characterized it as an effort to benefit the nearby businesses. Mr. Raffaelli cited the confusion in the Washington Street to North 2nd Street transition, and the subsequent movements to the Penn Street Bridge lanes. Mr. Haas hoped his plan would address that issue, and measured a 12-foot reduction in pedestrian crossing, with improved sight lines. Mr. Cinfici noted the complication of two lanes becoming four. Mr. Miller summarized the problem as those in the left lane of Washington Street cutting into the Bridge approach lanes on North 2nd Street. He said traffic in the left lane of Washington Street should be continuing in either the left-turning or straight-away lanes of North 2nd Street, echoing the position of the Police Department. He said the alignment of that turn isn't ideal, as even the right lane, of the two turning from Washington Street, follows into the straight-away lane of North 2nd Street. He described both of the Bridge lanes as 'new' from the perspective of traffic entering from Washington Street. Ms. Hoag observed a lot of jockeying for position following the turn,

especially at peak hours. Mr. Raffaelli recommended additional overhead signage to better organize that traffic. Mr. Haas mentioned the existing signs for US Route 422 Business, to remain, with additional line painting planned. Mr. Raffaelli felt that inadequate, as surface painting is often obscured in certain light and weather conditions. He further advised a refuge island in the North 2nd and Court Streets intersection. Mr. Haas said they'd considered one, until realizing there wasn't enough width to accommodate it and the travel lanes. He added that drivers finding themselves on the wrong side of such a feature could make the jockeying that much more hazardous. Mr. Miller said that eliminating a travel lane would cut down on the pedestrian-crossing distance, real and perceived. He mentioned the coordination and meetings hosted by the Public Works Department, and its part in a bigger picture involving improvements to the 2nd and Penn Streets intersection, the South 2nd Street to Franklin Street segment, and the Penn Street Bridge repair. Ms. Hoag noted the participation of the Reading Area Community College (RACC) and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT). Mr. Miller said he personally wasn't completely sold, but recognized the plan as being the most acceptable to the most stakeholders. He said his bigger concern was the occasional rumors of eliminating a lane from Washington Street, which he initially assumed this plan to cover. He said he would oppose such a change, though understanding the challenges to the businesses fronting that corridor. Asked if there were any other models available, or existing similar situations for comparison, Mr. Haas said he didn't know of any. Asked about the materials proposed for the crosswalks, he wasn't sure of the actual product, but described a brick-like pattern in its appearance and texture. Mr. Cinfici asked whether the improvements were being funded by a grant or the Foundation's general fund, and if they had any other interest in the project. Mr. Haas wasn't sure of either. Ms. Hoag referred to another transportation design being pursued by the Foundation (for Rockland Street between North 11th and North 13th Streets), and thought it part of a mission to encourage the success of the County's 'urban center'. The discussion turned back to lane selection and Mr. Bealer opined that the reduction might have a 'traffic calming' effect, as overall width seems directly proportional to travel speeds. Asked when the work was anticipated, Mr. Haas wasn't sure, alluding to the continuing changes. Mr. Miller wondered about the timing, and whether the Commission could take some additional time in their consideration. Mr. Haas thought it could wait until the following meeting. Mr. Miller explained that any position of the Commission would take the form of a recommendation to City Council in their consideration of a topographic change. He wasn't aware of any such ordinance having been introduced. He intended to distribute to the members the latest version received, in hopes of formulating a recommendation at the October meeting.

§508.3 agreement to extension-3150 S.F. Building Addition at 1001 Lancaster Avenue [2:39.23]

Mr. Miller explained that the engineer had a number of issues to address following the presentation at the July meeting. Mr. Bealer asked about the infrastructure questions raised. Ms. Hoag mentioned some utility features not shown on the plans.

Mr. Lauter moved to extend the review of the '3150 S.F. Building Addition at 1001 Lancaster Avenue' plan by three months, as requested in a September 18th letter emailed from the project manager. Mr. Cinfici seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve a three-month extension for the Piazza Honda and Acura dealerships' final subdivision and land development plan.

**Resolution #48-2015**

§508.3 agreement to extension-Parking Lot Expansion Emmanuel's House Property [2:42.27]

Mr. Bealer moved to extend the review of the 'Parking Lot Expansion Emmanuel's House Property' plan by 90 days, as requested in a September 15th letter emailed from the surveyor. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve a 90-day extension for the Emmanuel's House parking plan.

**Resolution #49-2015**

review the draft August 25, 2015 meeting minutes [2:43.42]

Mssrs. Cinfici and Bealer requested a few edits.

Mr. Lauter moved to accept the August minutes, with the edits. Mr. Cinfici seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the revised August 25th meeting minutes.

**Resolution #50-2015**

Mr. Miller distributed copies of the latest revisions to the proposed 'alternative energy' and 'riparian buffer' zoning amendments, prepared by the City's Environmental Advisory Council and received earlier that day. He said it appears they'll be progressing to the public-hearing phase in October. Ms. Hoag described them as similar to the prior versions, and said the 'steep slope' amendment is being withheld for further consideration. Mr. Miller noted the two meetings' worth of commentary available in the January 27th and August 25th meeting minutes, unsure if the Commission would have another opportunity or need to review it before City Council's action.

Asked if the Blighted Property Review Committee's reach extends to commercial properties, Mr. Bealer said it can. Mr. Raffaelli recommended the former 'Berks Engineering' property, on several parcels beginning at 201 South 6th Street, as a candidate for the Committee's review. Mr. Bealer offered to raise the matter at the next month's hearing, counting another ten properties already designated between the 200 and 300 blocks of South 6th Street.

Mr. Cinfici, prompted by the Emmanuel's House issue, recalled a former City program offering alley paving, wondering if it was still available. Ms. Hoag wasn't aware of such a program. Mr. Raffaelli thought it may have had something to do with the Model Cities Program and its funding. Mr. Cinfici remembered its use at late as 'the 2000s', including one such project in the 1200 block of Alsace Road, and wondered what options might still be available.

Mr. Lauter moved to adjourn the September meeting. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission adjourned the September 22nd meeting. – 9:57p